FIRST SOUBRETTES IN THE KLONDYKE (and What Miners Did to Them.)

Gold Nuggets and Bags of Gold Dust for the Bold Little Curly Haired Blondes Who Braved Chilkoot Pass.

"THEY made a wild kick," said Miss La More, "but they couldn't keep me. I was tired of beans."

Miss La More does not look like a person who would love beans for little or for long. She is distinctly suggestive of large bottles and small birds.

But then she does not look like a person who would get herself cheerfully into bloomers and gum boots and a sweater and a mackinaw shirt—whatever that is—and tramp the Chilkoot Pass to sing and dance in a tent theatre at Dawson City for six weeks of her fair young life.

She sat curled into the silk pillows of a big divan in a very rococo apartment and kicked an idle foot in and out of a flurry of white lace ruffles. She wore a negligee of blue foulard cut in the sweet, seductive shape known to the frank French as a hop-from-bed, with flurries of white lace all over it. Her pale, suspicionable hair was wadded up into a glittering bun behind, parted demurely before and curled with care over each ear. She gazed languidly out of big, blue, heavy-lidded eyes and smiled slowly with a small, sulky-sweet mouth and looked like a pink and white and blue and gold gumdrop which had never been taken from its silk-lined box.

"I was singing at the opera house 'n Juneau," pursued Miss La More, "when they got up the company to go in to Dawson. There were seventeen of us, with the manager—eight girls, seven fellows and a comedian. I thought it would be fun, you know, and a sort of change. I'm awfully fond of change."

She smiled on me like a candy angel when she said this, and flashed a brace of big diamonds around on her finger significantly.

"Get your diary, Gussie," said her sister.

Gussie slid out of her sofa pillows and frou-froued off after the diary.

"They were crazy about her inside," observed Sister, gazing fondly after the vanishing plumpness.

"Inside where?"

"Why, Dawson. They wanted to marry her."

"All of them?"

"Well, of course," said Sister, "some of them were married already. You get her to tell you about Swiftwater Bill and the Prince. What was the Prince's name, Gus?"

"Antone," called Gussie from the next room. "He was Violet's. I didn't care for him," she explained, frou-frouing in again with the diary. It was a costly little affair in morocco and silver, and she read exactly two lines out of it while I observed the elaborate loveliness of the covers.

"Left Dyea at 9 in the morning. Walked ten miles to Sheep Camp. That's where we slept," she said, dropping the diary. "I mean we tried to sleep—the whole gang in one room bunked on the floor with a piece of canvas strung up to keep out the saloon. But that was nothing. After that we'd have been glad of a floor. We had just a tarpaulin stretched on the snow when we slept at the foot of the summit, and a canvas over us, and the rain slopping down and the wind blowing all night like a trombone. Of course we slept in our clothes, but we got soaked just the same. The wind's the worst of it, you know. It burns you crisp and then you peel. Some of the girls blacked up the way the squaws do. They rub on a make-up of soot and some kind of grease, and they say it keeps you from burning, but it don't. The girls that did it peeled just the same."

"Did you peel?" I inquired, looking at her peachy cheeks and her little straight, white nose.

"Mercy, yes!" replied Miss La More. "Three or four times. I thought I'd get down to bones after a while. We had to camp three weeks on the lake while our boats were being built, for we took in a lot of stuff with us, and that's where we got the worst of it. Of course we didn't have any chance to fix up and we were sights when we got to Dawson. The whole town turned out to guy the girls. Our clothes were half rags and our boots gone, and we had on those big cowboy hats, and with our hair straight back—oh, gee! We didn't care, though. We gave them the laugh that night."

"You did not open that night?"

"Not in the theatre," replied Miss La More, with delicate reserve. "It took some time to get the theatre ready. It was a big tent, you know, and our manager bought out the man who had it—It was only a dance hall before, and we had to wait for the stage to be built. It was a great stage—about three by six, I guess, with two little boxes at each side. I used to take two steps each way on it and then go outside to turn around."

"You were a great hit, though, weren't you, Gussie?" said Sister.

"Well," said Gussie, modestly, "they liked me. I do coon songs and banjo, and I took up the latest ones, and of course the boys hadn't heard them and they went wild. The tent was packed every night and the boys were scrambling all over town to get twenties to throw on the stage, and we got all their nuggets the first night. Their wives," added Miss La More, pensively, "were wild."

"You were the belle, weren't you, Gussie?" said Sister, winding her up again.

"Well," said Miss La More again, "that's what they said."

"She had a house built for her"——began Sister.

"For me and Violet," interrupted Miss La More.

"And furnished, and it cost—how much did it cost, Gussie?"

"About ten thou'," said Gussie, stretching among her pillows. "It wasn't much of a house; you can't get much of a house for that in Dawson."

"It was the best in the town, though, wasn't it, Gussie?"

"Yes, it was. Oh, it was a pretty good cabin—two rooms and a kitchen. Then they got us a carpet that cost $5 a yard—one of the kind you can get here for about fifty cents—and we had sheets at $15 a pair and pillow cases at $10 apiece. But we had to take care of the cabin ourselves, though; the squaws wont work. We took turns at the coffee in the morning, and that's all the cooking we did. We were dined out every night. A beans and bacon dinner costs a dollar and a half up there, and when anything extra comes in you pay from ten to fifteen for a dinner. And extra never means anything but moose or goose."

"It wouldn't have made much difference to you, Gussie, what it cost," said Sister.

"Did you make much money?" I asked.

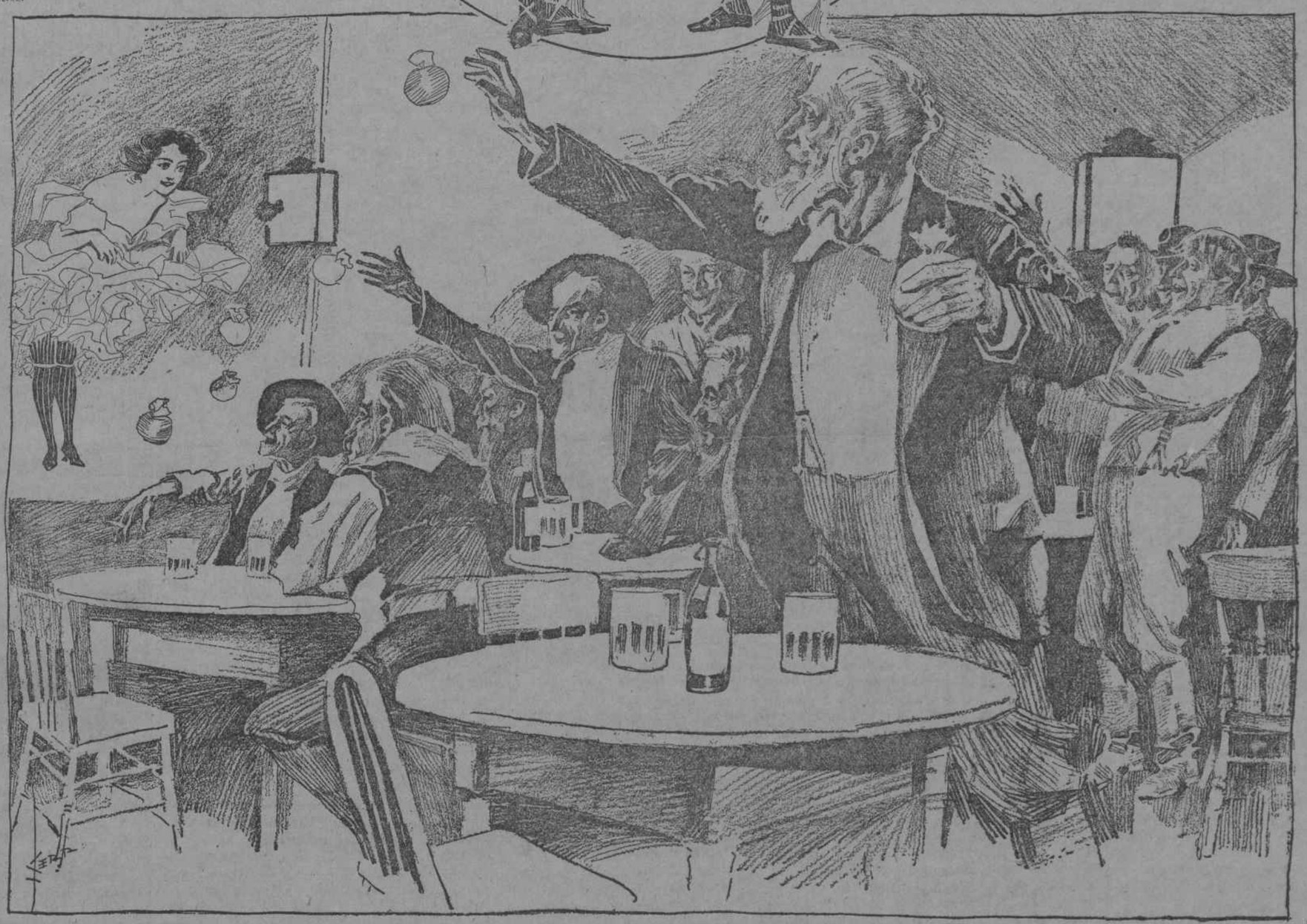
"I got a hundred a week—we all did—and $4 commission on every pint bottle we sold, and then the money that was thrown on the stage made about $50 more apiece for us—about a hundred and seventy-five or two hundred a week, and, of course, the nuggets. They slung nuggets at us by the handful. I've given most of mine away, but I've got a few left."

"Oh, Gussie," said Sister, "get them."

And Gussie got them. She brought them in a little leather bag and scattered them out over the table and turned them idly with her white, dimpled, bediamoned pink-nailed fingers. There were fifty-two of them, solid chunks of rich, rough yellow metal, that men are struggling and starving for in the Alaskan snow fields.

Miss La More gathered them up indifferently.

"They're nice," she said, "for curiosities."



"I GOT A HUNDRED A WEEK—WE ALL DID—AND $4 COMMISSION ON EVERY PINT BOTTLE WE SOLD, AND THEN THE MONEY THAT WAS THROWN ON THE STAGE MADE ABOUT $50 MORE APIECE FOR US—ABOUT A HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-FIVE OR TWO HUNDRED A WEEK, AND, OF COURSE, THE NUGGETS. THEY SLUNG NUGGETS AT US BY THE HANDFUL"

She had some strange, barbaric nugget jewelry made from them, too—cuff-links and a rude bracelet—which some Dawson City goldsmith had fashioned at fabulous Dawson City prices.

"They just gave her everything," said Sister, still adoring.

"They treated us well," agreed Miss La More, fingering the nuggets. "They're good-hearted fellows and crazy to fling their money. I suppose you heard about the kerosene can of gold? No? Well, they had that story in there—how Swiftwater Bill laid a kerosene can of gold dust at my feet when he asked me to marry him. It wasn't true, though.

"Wasn't it?" I said. I would have swallowed a few kerosene cans without winking after all the rest.

"It was just talk about the kerosene can, you know," pursued Miss La More. "He gave me the dust in a sack."

"Oh!"

She smiled softly. "I'm going in again in the Spring."

"They'll never let you out again," said Sister. "Tell about Swiftwater Bill, Gussie."

Gussie laughed. "What will I tell?" she asked. "Just that he wanted to marry me. They all want wives in there, but they all want good-looking ones. They're pretty particular, considering that they haven't got much choice. All the girls could have married, and I guess they'll have to if they stay in there all Winter. It's all well enough for the comedian to stay, he writes his own songs, but the girls can't do that. They can't learn any new tunes or get any new clothes in there." Miss La More shook her head compassionately. "There'll be nothing else for them to do. They'll have to marry."

"Is Mr. Swiftwater Bill agreeable?" I inquired at this point.

Miss La More considered the question.

"He's as stupid as an owl," she replied, finally, "and as rich as—anything. He used to shoot the White Horse Rapids—that's where he got his name—and he got a lay from a fellow up in the Eldorado and it ought to be worth a million. He'll know," she continued thoughtfully, "by Spring."

"And then?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe," said Miss La More laughing.

"She was sick up there," said Sister, "and he bought her all the eggs in town. He paid twenty-five dollars for eleven—wasn't it eleven, Gussie?"

"Yes," said Gussie, "and there wasn't a good one in the lot. He went off and kicked about it, and the man who sold them to him said: 'Why, cert! If they'd been fresh I'd have charged you fifty for them.' That made me laugh."

"And did Mr. S. W. Bill laugh too?"

"Oh, yes!" said Gussie. "He was only mad because I didn't have the eggs. Five chickens came into Dawson the next week and they laid one egg between them. I got it."

"And champagne," added Sister. "You always had champagne."

"Whenever it came in," said Miss La More, "the boys always bought it up for us. It sells in there for seventeen dollars a pint, thirty for a quart. I must tell you about the night I tended bar. You see," she interrupted herself, modestly, "I had a lot of friends in town and the house thought I'd make a big hit at the bar, so they offered me $50 for the night and talked it round town. Well, the town came. I thought it was awful kind and good hearted of the boys to show up so large. I wouldn't take their money—I treated the whole town. When I settled for the night I owed the bar $25, and, of course," Miss La More smiled sweetly, "that was all they cleared."

"Did you always play to big houses?"

"Packed every time," said Miss La More. "And a nice crowd, too. We taught the boys all the choruses and they sang with us and it sounded fine. We gave three performances a week, that was all, and then there were dances on the off nights. We didn't have to go unless we wanted to. They had regular dance hall girls, and the boys came down from the Gulch and danced all night and way until nine and ten o'clock the next morning, until the sun was shining down on the canvas and the girls were dropping on the floor. But the boys paid them good money for their work, especially the good-looking ones. It pays," added Miss La More, looking down at her pretty hands, "to be good looking. I'm going to take the kids in next Spring."

"The kids?" I asked.

"The Twins," replied Miss La More, "Haven't you heard of the La More Twins, Nell and Bell? They're in the business, too. They're my sisters. My brother's in the business, too—George La More. Sometimes he's billed at The Great Bush. He does the Golden Vampire, you know."

"Ah!" I said, with an air of polite intelligence. "And is he going in, too, in the Spring?"

"No," said Miss La More, "it's no place for men. I'll learn a turn with the kids—something new. I've come to New York to pick up some new business and a new wardrobe, and we'll go in early before the lakes break up and sled in. We'll get there ahead of everything and take the town."

"And Swiftwater Bill," suggested Sister, who seemed to incline to the safe side of things. But Miss La More laughed.

"If I had my choice of making a fortune, I'd rather be a weigher than an actress or a rich man's wife, or anything else I know of. You just stand by the blower and weigh the dust when the boys hand over their sacks, and if you're pretty and they like you, they're willing to let you spill a little every time just for luck. All you have to do is to spill all day and to pan your carpet at night. That's the way to get rich in Dawson."

"Then," I said, rising to go, "you really advise all the pretty girls to go to Dawson in the Spring?"

"Not much, I don't," said Miss La More. "I'm going in again, then, myself."

REAL LIFE AT DAWSON.

By E. J. Livernash.

Dawson City, via San Francisco, Sept. 10.—Have you ever seen a boy on his first spree, bragging, swearing, throwing around his money, pretending to twice the drunkenness that is his legitimately, out-rounding the old rounders, proud of his fling and anxious that the world should know what a devil of a fellow he is? If you have you know the spirit of Dawson City.

You begin to swagger as soon as you get into it. It is midnight on the Tenderloin all the time in the Klondyke country.

To be sure, among the three thousand inhabitants of the triangle of tents and cabins there are some who lay the bricks of their fortunes with serious faces and without turning aside for faro, whiskey or women, but these are crows among the snow birds. When the story is done we know, of course, that these will be bank presidents and capitalists, while the young fellow over the way, who has just slammed a sack half full of gold dust on the bar with a magnificently profane order that it remain there until it is drunk up by the crowd, will be telling how rich he was back in '97.

Dawson is the wildest yet. Not Leadville in its red heyday nor Tombstone with the lid off, nor San Francisco in the flush of '49 was as picturesque in its riot of wealth as this place up in the Arctic. Only in killing do they have us beat. We are peaceable and comparatively honest yet. Gold is too plentiful to be worth the risk of stealing. It is the pride of the inhabitants that the camp is a record breaker. It is Dawson's vanity, and citizens look approvingly when Swift Water Bill bets a thousand on a card at the Aurora saloon and Sitka Bella flings bottles of champagne at $50 a bottle at the miner who has incurred her displeasure. There isn't a man in the Aurora that will not gladly pour out the three ounces of dust to pay for each missile as long as she feels like hurling wine.

Dawson knows what is due from the richest gold camp the world has ever known, and there is public spirit enough to make it sure that it will not fail to keep its reputation for recklessness and lurid extravagance up where it belongs.

Is it the richest camp the world has ever known? There is not a man in Dawson City that doubts it for an instant. I have seen more dust and nuggets than I ever dreamed of, and they were shown as proof of stories of such incredible wealth that I will not repeat them. It is not the spirit of Dawson that makes me say the placers of the Yukon are beyond comparison in richness. The outlook is so full of promise that one dare not forecast the limit of the riches men will drag from this frozen land.

You observe the names—"Swift Water Bill," "Sitka Belle," etc., like an echo of Bert Harte over the ice fields. It may be imitation, it may be the natural result of similar conditions, but the whole thing is conventional and the wilder it gets the more conventional it is. The serious purpose of everybody is to get the wealth from the bars, but they do not go about it seriously. Everybody seems to be playing a part in a bonanza melodrama and to be conscious of the picturesqueness of his clothes—hence the lack of genuineness in the wild and woolly names. But with all this living up to a reputation Dawson is really the maddest town that ever turned the moral code topsy-turvy.

Men fling to a painted dancer on a rough board stage nuggets representing as much as they mulled and toiled a month for in New York or San Francisco. What any man has is so little in comparison with what he expects to have next week or next season, that it is not worth saving.

So Dawson is a clink of glasses, a smash of bottles, a rattle of chips, the crazy music of the hurdy gurdy, the shrill, metallic, professional laugh of women.

And over it all hangs the shadow of the famine that everybody knows is coming. Food will be scare this Winter; how scarce nobody knows yet. Many may die of hunger.

Well, what of it?

It can't be helped by worrying or hoarding. If no food comes food can't be bought. All the more reason for keeping things whirling.

There is no repose in Dawson. Everything is roaring, and there is a merry sort of devilry in gambling and drinking—drinking and throwing around the gold that men elsewhere are dying to get, in the face of this spectre of the Arctic Winter.

There are John Oakhursts all over the place. In this whizz and whir the man who keeps his head has all the best of it, and the faro dealers are gathering in the gold dust in scoops.

There are three thousand persons in the camp and two thousand scattered along the creeks within fifty miles of it. The three thousand are in tents and cabins on a level swamp, some of it timbered with slender poplars, and all of it dismal, and the swamp does its best to be a triangle, and puts its base along the yellow Yukon. Front street faces the Yukon, and a strip averaging 150 feet in width has been reserved as a thoroughfare. Front street never sleeps. There may be some connection between this insomnia and the circumstance that there are fourteen barrooms on the street, where one sees such writing on the wall as this: "Stud poker checks $5 a stack." "Flushes beat threes." "Straights don't go." "This faro game never closes; $25 to $50."

The revelry is not so indecent as the revelry of the slums of a great city, but it is more delirious, and it is not aggressive and keeps its temper.

Really, the list of amusements is very short, but what is lacking in variety is made up in price. It costs a dollar a dance and you dont get your choice of partners; every drink costs half a dollar, excepting beer, which has not answered at roll call since Paddy Burns drained his glass thirty sleeps ago. If one says mildly: "Boys, have something," the man in the starched coat, behind the bar, takes half an ounce from the inviter's sack, and if one having sturdy lungs shouts: "Gentlemen, it's mine, step up," the barkeeper ruthlessly abstracts three ounces. Every ounce of yellow flakes, by the way, is an equivalent to $17.

The green baize is an expensive elbow rest in Dawson. There is scarcely a game in camp which does not run wide open. A thousand dollars on the turn of a card is not unknown. "Swift Water Bill," arose from the table one evening last week—the evenings are long up here—and paid a packer an ounce to carry his winnings for the sitting. There was $12,000 in the sack. Bill cleaned up $39,000 that week.

Another miner from further up the river came in with $10,000 and left it all with the faro bank.

Silver is scarce. Minted gold is not common, but gold dust is plentiful. Every man has some of it. When one wishes to pay a bill, whether it be fifty cents or as many dollars, he tosses his sack on the counter, and the requisite dust is laid out. Then the man behind the counter reties the sack and tosses it to the man on the other side.

Saw logs not less than twelve inches in diameter bring not less than $[illegible] sand board feet; at the Ladue saw-mill sawed lumber, unplaned, retails for $150 a thousand, and ordinary pine door panels sell for $17. Carpenters command $20 a day, and unskilled labor is not attainable for less than $10 a day, so that house-building, under the average conditions, is somewhat costly.

Besides the few merchandise shops and the fourteen barrooms, there are on Front street four little restaurants, two lodging-houses, two baker shops, two brokerages, one watchmaker shop, one cobbler stand, three bakeries, two laundries, one cooperage, one cabinet maker shop, one fish stall, two dental offices, and the offices of two physicians. On other streets are two smithies, one tin shop, one jewelry shop, two restaurants and one bakery.

A cup of coffee costs 25 cents, a sandwich the same, a bowl of canned oysters 75 cents, a piece of pie 25 cents; an egg is worth $1 in its youth, and more than that as steamer day fades further in the past. A place to lay the head o' night costs $1.50 per sleep, and you must be your own chambermaid and porter; a steel pen point costs 25 cents; a hair spring for you watch $10; fresh salmon 25 cents a pound; fresh moose meat 50 cents the pound; a half-sole for the shoe $5 and stand in line; a porous plaster, prescribed by a doctor, $5 if you call, $10 if you prefer to sulk in your tent until the plaster and doctor get there.

But these prices work no hardship. All the old-timers have gold enough to pay them and the newcomers have provisions with them. As for the 50-cent whiskey and the $50 champagne, there are plenty of millionaires about who like to offer up their sacks of dust to make the poor feel at home.

The prices are based on speculation as to the severity of the prospective famine. Thus far practically none of the 5,000 tons of supplies said to have been transported to the island of St. Michael's has been brought here excepting whiskey. Fast mail steamers are on the way, we are told, but the river is full of sand bars, and it is known that one vessel, a 300-ton steamer of the North American Company, is on a bar, probably for the Winter, above Circle City, and The Bell, an Alaska Commercial Company's steamer, is nearly a fortnight overdue.

The river ordinarily becomes blocked by anchor ice early in October, and therefore apprehension is felt that famine in the Klondyke is assured. Those pilgrims who are toiling along the Chilkoot route and the Skaguay trail will fall short of fully supplying their own needs, it is feared, and most of the 5,000 who are here are dependent, to a great extent, on the stores of the two big trading companies.

But the starving is in the future, and it does not seem imminent to men whose eyes are dazzled by the gold that seems as plentiful as coppers in New York.

So the men of Dawson drink and the women dance and help them spend their money. There is hardly one of the women who could not marry a rich man, but they feel they cannot afford it. They can be rich on their own account without the incumbrance of a husband.

A man who in civilization would chafe and curse himself for a week because the $20 he got on Saturday night slipped through his fingers during a spree will stagger around Dawson and feel no worse in the morning when he finds that his tear has cost him hundreds or even thousands. He owns a claim somewhere up the gulch that is a bank to draw on indefinitely.

Such is Dawson City. It will be wilder yet next year, and before the Fall of 1898 it will be a metropolis of uproar and pleasure rioting.

As I close this letter a woman's voice shrills above the usual dance hall din—I omit the profanity:

"I've got dust enough to choke a hippopotamus. I ain't no Chilcat. I'm a lady, and I don't need nobody to buy me wine!"